

**‘Good Women Stay at Home. Bad Women Go Everywhere’:
Emotion, Agency and Sexuality in Sri Lankan Migrant Narratives
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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the lives of poor, rural Sri Lankan women and their migration to and from the Persian Gulf. While women emphasise the economic concerns underlying their migration, I argue that despite their poverty, their motivations also need to be understood in terms of their emotional involvement and desires toward spouses, as well as their aspirations for honour and respect. Defining agency as a capacity for action and self-transformation that the historically-specific relations of South Asian domestic workers’ subordination creates, I suggest that women act as moral agents engaged in a process of making a more embodied self as they hope for change in their lives. Migration for domestic labour is popularly perceived as morally undesirable due to the stigmatisation of women for their sexual vulnerability and supposed sexual promiscuity, and the detrimental effects these perceived changes are thought to have upon families and Sri Lankan cultural values. Within these processes, I view sexuality, and the different ways it is expressed in spousal relationships and the body, as a crucial dimension of power that shapes and organises processes of migration and self re-making. Judged by traditional, patriarchal norms, which operate within a shared universe of morals underpinning the religious landscape of Sri Lanka, the lives of the Muslim migrant women whom I discuss are particularly influenced by virtues derived from Islam. I examine how these intersect with regulatory norms of gender and class to influence the ways in which women are categorized as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Through an exploration of narratives to do with agency, sexuality, emotion and love towards past, existing or prospective spouses, this chapter examines the ways in which migrant women negotiate, submit and/or defy negative moral representations of them, and how spousal relationships are negotiated, re-constructed or eroded across Sri Lanka and the Gulf as women aspire for more honour. My findings are based on ethnographic, doctoral fieldwork over a period of two years in the rural locality of Kalpitiya in North-western Sri Lanka, and in Kuwait.

Kalpitiya in the district of Puttalam is viewed in national terms as a deprived, remote, rural area of Sri Lanka. Though it is not the prime migrant-sending region, in 2009, the district sent the sixth highest number of domestic workers (6,793) out of Sri Lanka, the largest proportion of whom (1,789) left from Kalpitiya sub-division (SLBFE, 2009). Kalpitiya is ranked as the fifth-poorest sub-division within the country,¹ with poor socio-economic indicators, such as a low average income, high incidence of unemployment, and an unequal system of land ownership that makes men and women reliant on exploitative and low-paid *coolie tollil* or day labour in the form of agriculture, salt production or fishing. There are particular economic constraints on women seeking work outside of day labour, and socio-cultural constraints against their migration to urban centres to work in the garment or service sectors, and these constraints translate into pressure upon them to migrate to the Persian Gulf for domestic work. Their migration occurs against the backdrop of South Asian migration to West Asia, which has brought significant social transformations, particularly through migrants’ accumulation of economic and symbolic resources that they use to move through social hierarchies of ethnicity, gender, class and caste (Gardner and Osella, 2004).² Over three-quarters of Sri Lankan overseas workers move to West Asia, with Saudi Arabia hosting the largest group of over 500,000, and Kuwait hosting the second-largest group of more than 200,000 Sri Lankans. Sri Lanka is the leading South Asian country deploying foreign domestic labour (SLBFE, 2009).³

While the economic necessity of women's transnational migration is widely upheld, the social and moral consequences of this migration are issues of contention within Sri Lankan society. Notions of morality towards women's mobility do not exist in a vacuum, but they are embedded in norms of society, religion and politics, which permeate a shared universe of morals that transcend ethnic boundaries. These attitudes are thought to be influenced by nationalist and communal state ideologies, which have historically emphasised women's primary role as mothers and paid labour as their secondary, less respected role (Jayawardana & De Alwis, 1995). They are a particular composite of Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and Christian value systems, which lend themselves to the creation of a 'sexualized' discourse on women's migration for domestic work largely sustained by popular perceptions and the media. The Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)—the key, state agency regulating migration—discourages women from migrating as domestic workers, yet it provides them with the institutional means to migrate and fails to provide viable alternatives to migration.⁴ Partly as a result of the SLBFE's efforts to reduce female migration, the proportion of domestic workers among all Sri Lankan transnational economic migrants had reduced from over 80 per cent in the 1990s to around 50 per cent by 2007.

State practices on female migration, in some respects, reflect the sentiments of religious leaders. In the case of Muslim women, their lives are most closely affected by the views of local Islamic leaders, or *maulavis*, some of whom discourage both women and men from migrating by citing particular interpretations of religious doctrine that advise against the separation of husbands and wives for more than six months. To take into account the Islamic obligation for husbands to provide for their families, certain *maulavis* suggest that male migration should be allowed in cases of dire economic need. My observations suggest that both state migration practices and the moral discourse of local religious leaders do not adequately address the economic reality of labour markets in the Gulf that demand low-paid female, rather than male labour, as well as women's socio-cultural and personal motivations for migration. The ethnographies below illustrate women's sentiments regarding religious, societal and state perceptions of their migration being socially undesirable.

My interest in migrant women's emotion and sexuality emerged during a seven-year period of working with non-profit organizations on Asian labour migration. Though my work focused on policy advocacy and the building of migrant-community organizations, I was most strongly drawn to my friendships with migrant women who shared their experiences of intimacy and betrayal and the powers associated with sexuality. I eventually re-channelled my interest into doctoral research on migrant women's psychosocial health. My research approach was based primarily on the 'narrative approach', defined as 'the imaginative linking of experiences and events into a meaningful story or plot' (Good, 1994: 118). But to address the limitations of this approach, which has been criticized for masking relations of power and social relations (Gronseth, 2001), I also integrate the practices of 'critical reflexive' ethnographic writing (Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson 1997) and feminist ethnography (Davies, 2008; Wolf, 1996; Lal, 1996).

This chapter draws on ethnographic research from my doctoral fieldwork, which was primarily based in Kalpitiya in North-western Sri Lanka—a remote, rural locality—over the course of two years (between 2009 and 2011) and subsequently in Kuwait. Kalpitiya is characterised by a high concentration of Tamil-speaking persons, these being 'Muslims' and 'Tamils',⁵ and the presence of a significant population (70,000) of displaced persons who were forcibly displaced from Mannar in the Northern Province in the early 1990s, and who have been living a semi-settled existence ever since. My primary research informants were derived from this interconnected Tamil-speaking minority population, which can be differentiated into three groups—the 'host-community' Muslims (*ur alkkel*); Muslims who had been displaced in 1990 (*muhaam alkkel*); and Tamils. I documented the experiences in detailed narrative form of twenty-five women from this population, and of sixty Sinhala and Tamil women in less detailed form through a combination of participant observation

and in-depth and semi-structured interviews. In addition, I also recorded the case studies of more than twenty migrant women while they were working in Kuwait. In this chapter, I have chosen to consider three Muslim women, whose stories illustrate the various sorts of change that occur in women's agency, emotion and honour in relation to their spouses and over the course of their migration.

Sexuality and Honour in Migrant Marriages

"Women are used to coming and going. They have no family life, no values. That's not the life. We are Buddhist, we are very strength. The families who migrate don't have strength . . . Migrant remittances have not been so helpful. It is a useless journey. If they could manage their money properly, they could manage from here. But going abroad has become a style".

A high-ranking government official in the North-western Province, Sri Lanka. Female, Sinhala Buddhist

For the migrant women whom I address, their aspirations for migration and honour need to be understood in connection to popular narratives of migrant female sexuality, which are regulated by gender norms and structured by sexuality. I address these issues through a synthetic understanding of sexuality and gender as being both distinct and complexly interrelated (Butler, 2004),⁶ an approach widely used within recent anthropology on sexual health. Correa et al., define sexuality as, ' . . . the domain of bodily and social experience produced through ever-changing discourses, norms and regulatory practices that operate where desire, behaviour, identity and institutional power meet' (Correa, Petchesky and Parker, 2008: 7). Borrowing from Cantu (2009) to address migrants' sexuality more specifically, I view sexuality not merely as a uni-dimensional variable, but as a dimension of power in a system of stratified relations that need to be incorporated into analyses of migrants' experiences.⁷ Sexuality and reproductive health are increasingly being discussed as central sites where social values are constituted and contested, and where political contestations, particularly those surrounding migration, inter-communal and inter-state relations, are expressed (Tober et al., 2006; Sargent, 2006).

While the emphasis of my own work is on migrants' agency and emotion as these relate to spousal relations, aspirations for honour and the making of a more embodied self, I use sexuality as an axis of analysis to explore these processes. My approach contrasts emerging studies of migrants' sexual cultures, which tend to focus on the experiences of migrants as 'sexual minorities' or 'sexual migrants' who migrate as a direct consequence of sexuality (Cantu, 2009: 22; Ahmad, 2009; Herdt, 1997).⁸ While recognising the variety of sexual attachments that can motivate migration (Mai and King, 2009), particularly among those who migrate from a constraining space to one imagined as more liberal, it must be said that the Muslim women of Kalpitiya—who are the focus of this chapter—are migrating from the constraints of their village to another constraining space of Gulf societies. My observations suggest that their migration is primarily motivated by aspirations for honour, rather than the seeking of new sexual experiences, though such experiences may be an unintended or secondary outcome.

The sexuality of mobile Sri Lankan women, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, is a fundamental concern highlighted within popular perceptions of transnational migrant women, and it is also addressed within the literature on Sri Lankan women workers (Lynch, 1999) and migrant domestic workers (Smith, 2010; Gamburd, 2000; Moukarbel, 2009, 2009b; and UNDP, 2009). The imagined or real intimate actions of migrant women challenge normative Sri Lankan views of sexual morality, and the former are part of meta-narratives that highlight the various 'social ills' of female migration, these being abuse, rape, prostitution, sexual promiscuity, dissolving marriages, neglected children, and how these contribute to the erosion of 'Sri Lankan cultural values'. Male migrant sexuality, however, is not subjected to the same level of moral scrutiny as female migrant sexuality,⁹ and this double standard is deeply embedded in the ways in which male-female sexuality has historically evolved across cultures.¹⁰ Regardless of whether they have engaged in intimate relations while abroad or not, women are seen as tainted for having engaged in extra-marital or pre-marital affairs, and they thereby transgress norms of

virginity and fidelity. Images of decadence and sensuality colour popular perceptions of domestic workers, with her enhanced appetites for food and sex, and her physical alterations in dress, jewellery and body size. Gamburd (2000) argues how these images—also generated by the media and reproduced at different levels of society—are different from the average experience of a domestic worker.

While research has found that Sri Lankan women do engage in intimate relationships while abroad (Smith, 2010; Moukarbel, 2009b), much more needs to be understood regarding the prevalence and motivations underlying these relationships. Smith (2010) highlighted the ways in which Sri Lankan women had ambivalent desires for independence and new intimate relationships on the one hand, and for motherhood/wifehood on the other, while they changed notions of what is morally permissible to match new desires and practical needs. My observations of women in Kalpitiya and Kuwait, particularly from the perspective of their emotions, indicate rather differently: that these women did continue to conform to notions of morality dominant in Sri Lanka even while they were abroad, and though some adapted aspects of their sexual culture—for example in their dress and ways of searching for and attracting potential spouses—their notions of morality remained largely unaltered.

The social construction of migrant women's spousal relations and sexual culture is integrally linked to the ways in which notions of sexuality developed historically in the context of South Asian societies. Particular rules of respectability for women have been constructed in South Asia, where their biological and primary role of motherhood has been strongly emphasized, and paid labour is rendered as women's secondary, and often disrespected activity. Mobile women are seen as loose women who have transgressed assumptions of their immobility and disrupted traditional gender roles (Lynch, 1999) as they challenge attempts to control their sexuality through confinement in the home and being kept in subordinate and familial positions.¹¹ Jayawardena and De Alwis (1995) assert that women's behaviour became/becomes the target of control, and their bodies symbolise the space of the nation that is then subject to manipulation by nationalist and revivalist ideologies.

While these ideas cut across South Asian nations, class and religious groups,¹² the particular experiences of rural Muslim women in Kalpitiya are cloaked in the language of cultural practices derived from Islam. While the *maulavis* whom I interviewed were not able to provide me with specific references from established Islamic jurisprudence supporting their views, many supported the institution of strong restrictions upon women's physical mobility that aim to preserve their safety and purity, and to uphold the honour of families and communities. Appropriate Muslim feminine behaviour is characterised by veiling and restricted mobility (*parda*), and the inculcation of the notions of shame and honour. There is a clear distinction between 'women of the home' and 'wanton women' or 'women who go everywhere', the latter being auspicious, good, calm and quiet, and the former being inauspicious, uncontrollable, without etiquette, quarrelsome and with connotations of sexual misbehaviour (Rozario, 2002: 45). Referring to Muslim societies more broadly, Mernissi (2003: 54-5) suggests that it is the disruptive power of female sexuality, rather than sexuality itself, that poses as a symbol of disorder (*fitna*) and justifies defensive reactions towards women in the form of instituted protections to safeguard against heterosexual involvement outside of marriage, including sexual segregation and women's restricted mobility.¹³

Finally, I suggest it is important to view women's sexuality in relation to the gendered effects of migration, particularly upon families and marriages, and the related gender roles that migrant women and their spouses hold. More than half of all Asian migrant women leave behind small children in various sending countries, and by consequence, migration inevitably and significantly affects family roles and marriages (Parrenas, 2001; Constable, 1997; Kottegoda, 2006; Samarasingha, 1989). It is popularly thought that marriages do not collapse when men migrate, while female migrants' chance of separation increases upon return. Zlotnik (1995) suggests, however, that one cannot

conclude that female migration increases marital instability because female migration and divorces are linked, as women who face difficulties within their marriages are more likely to migrate than those in stable unions. It has also been found that male migration and the leaving behind of female-headed households has given rise to social perceptions of marriages being weakened (Pathirage and Collyer, 2011). Moreover, the strains placed upon marriages affected by migration are further constituted by economic and political factors. While domestic workers' conditions of formal employment under the *kafala* or sponsorship system seriously limits her opportunities for social communication, GCC labour migration policies prevent low-status migrants from bringing in dependent, non-working spouses, consequently leading to spouses often leading separate lives.¹⁴

Agency, Self and Emotion in Migrant Women's Sexuality

Having laid out the ways in which Sri Lankan migrant women's spousal relations are related to sexuality, notions of honour and gender norms, I now discuss the connections between women's agency in migration, their emotion and their sense of self. Firstly, I suggest that women migrate largely due to their emotional involvement with past, present or prospective spouses and their aspirations for honour, wherein spousal relations are a fundamental site in which women's agency plays out. Secondly, I define migrant women's agency as a capacity for action and self-transformation that the historically specific relations of South Asian women's and domestic workers' subordination enables and creates. As migration shifts migrants' sense of self, I suggest that women act as moral agents, and they migrate as part of processes to re-make a more embodied self, especially as these relate to honour and spousal relations. Thirdly, I view sexuality as a key dimension of power that organises women's processes of self re-making and structures judgements of her moral integrity, the cumulative effects of which can be embodied physiologically and emotionally.

My usage of the definition of women's agency—as a capacity for action and self-transformation within historically-specific relations of subordination—is derived from the work of Saba Mahmood, who calls for agency to be seen ‘. . . not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action . . . that are related to women's desires, aspirations and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject’ (2001: 203). Referring to Egyptian women involved in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam, Mahmood suggests that agency needs to be understood differently in the context of lives that have been shaped by non-liberal traditions, and where moral virtues are accorded an important place. She argues that certain notions in feminist scholarship that seek to locate the political and moral autonomy of the subject in the face of power are limited in their ability to understand women's lives in the above-such contexts, and suggests that this poses as a challenge to contemporary feminist debates. Mahmood draws upon Judith Butler's idea of ‘subjectivation’—that the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1980, 1983). But she differs from Butler in her consideration of agency as other than the capacity to subvert norms, and instead, as the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of acts (Mahmood, 2001: 210).

Mahmood also contrasts this concept of agentival action with another that urges us to think of agency not only as the capacity for progressive change, but as the capacity to endure, suffer and persist. She suggests that ‘agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in progressive change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability’ (2001: 212).¹⁵ Drawing upon Das (1999), Mahmood explains that women's ability to survive the presence of pain can be viewed in terms of the “doing of little things” that does not have the sense of “passive submission but of an active engagement” (Das, 1999: 11-12). Das further suggests that the experience of pain is not limited to passive suffering, but also enables certain ways of inhabiting the world that must be explored through an analysis of the languages in which the pain resides.

In order to address agency within sexuality and spousal relations, it is necessary for me to combine Mahmood's contrasting concept of agentival action with Unnithan-Kumar's (2001) concept of reproductive agency being the motivation and desire to seek out reproductive healthcare. Unnithan-Kumar suggests that the contestation of authority may be a related but perhaps a largely unintended, secondary outcome. Discussing poor women in rural Rajasthan, India, she describes the non-contraception of women's experiences as part of their *doxa* (taken for granted) of the normalised part of their lives (2001: 33). In this and another study, Unnithan-Kumar (2003) suggests that women's sexual and reproductive well-being is influenced more by loyalties and desires towards spouses and poverty, rather than by notions of 'rights'. Mahmood and Unnithan-Kumar's work differs from earlier writing on women's agency that discusses how acts of resistance may not have a desired outcome, even though the politics of subordinate groups can be seen as part of 'everyday forms of resistance' (Scott 1993, cited in Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 33).¹⁶ The definition of agency as developed by the former two scholars emphasises upon agency as not necessarily involving the resistance or contestation of power, and this is a conceptualisation that relates well to the context of Muslim women in Kalpitiya. These women are strongly motivated by notions of morality and virtue—rather than those of an autonomous free will—as they cultivate qualities associated with feminine submissiveness and the feminine roles of wifehood and motherhood. I suggest that by viewing these women as moral agents in their self-transformation, the language of their aspirations and pain can be better understood.

I suggest that this discussion of agentival action needs to be extended to address issues of self, as women migrate to re-make a more embodied self. As persons who need to have the capacity to tell who they are, and to grasp and communicate this to other people, migrant women negotiate and re-create their selves through new interactions with their changing social worlds and relations, and through the fluid identities that are bestowed upon them by spouses, kin, employers, community, media and the state.¹⁷ Their sense of self is permeated by virtues of honour and morality that propel them to seek enhancements in their moral status through changes in spousal relations that are potentially created by migration. Their feelings and emotions, with which they leave Sri Lanka, are confronted by the cultural and political conditions of host countries, propelling the self to undergo profound changes as they make sense of new realities. While migrants' sense of self is undoubtedly challenged and threatened, consciously or unconsciously, they cope by resisting or allowing changes to this sense of self, which can provide the opportunity for migrants' re-imagining their lives.

These processes of self re-making are integrally connected to the social and cultural construction of migrant women's emotions (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Scheper-Hughes 1988; Unnithan-Kumar 2001) and how these are embodied. Notions of 'I' (the individual) can be seen in connection to those of the self/'me' (the social person), and women's 'real' expression of grief as an individual is less important than the collective importance of their suffering (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). My observations in Kalpitiya support these understandings, as women interviewees rarely discussed their emotions in relation to themselves as individuals, but in terms of their emotions and obligations towards children and spouses, or in relation to physical health. While migration both limits and promotes emotional expressivity towards spouses, women often migrate as part of efforts to bring more desirous outcomes in spousal relationships, such as feeling more intimacy and receiving more care and love from their spouses. Some women discussed their emotions directly. For others, their emotions only arose as part of broader discussions of their physical health problems and of the meanings they assigned to these problems. Hence, my perspective as an ethnographer of psychosocial health enabled me to identify and explore some of the physiological effects of women's emotions and the non-verbal language that they used to express its effects, both of which were an integral part of not only their world inhabited by pain, but also of their self-transformation.¹⁸

One may doubt, however, how migrant domestic workers' subordinate conditions can provide self-transformative potential. In Asian host countries, the subordinate

conditions of domestic workers' as low-wage, temporary workers and racialised woman—manifested through their 'dehumanisation', 'multiple displacement' and 'devaluation'—impact profoundly on the migrant domestic worker self. The 'dehumanisation' of domestic workers is powerfully articulated by Anderson (2000), who discusses how domestic workers' 'personhood' is appropriated in their relationship with employers, which leaves them 'socially-dead'.¹⁹ Going beyond migrant-employee relationships, Parrenas describes the 'multiple dislocations' of domestic workers' experiences as '... the positions into which external forces in society constitute the subject of migrant domestic workers' (2001: 3), and are manifested through the pain of family separation, the experience of contradictory class mobility, and the feeling of social exclusion or non-belonging in the migrant community (2001: 23). The migrant domestic worker self is impacted at an even broader level, as they are 'devaluated' by society at large through the lack of recognition of the productive and reproductive value of domestic labour (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003).²⁰ While recognising the traumatic impact of these conditions upon the migrant self, I suggest that their effects are more dynamic and complex what is often conveyed by structural and subject-level analyses of domestic workers' conditions. As the ethnography below will demonstrate, the ways in which women organise their lives are constitutive of very different and composite forms of personhood and knowledge that evolve within projects of self re-making.

The Ethnographies: Amina, Shafna and Jansila

I now turn to the experiences of agency, emotion and sexuality of three Muslim transnational migrant women, Amina, Shafna and Jansila, with whom I became close over the course of one to two years.²¹ They worked/work as domestic workers in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, and they come from neighbouring resettlement villages in Kalpitiya. Their stories illustrate issues of emotion that led women to migrate. The emotional factors that influenced their migration included their experience of widowhood or of being unmarried, their aspirations for honour, the kinds of relations they had with spouses, and the sorts of change that occurred in their actions as moral agents. Women did not articulate goals of self-transformation as part of their motivations for migration, but their migration often did catalyse changes involving various dimensions of their selves—in their virtues, their ideas of themselves, and their views of their lives—and involving aspects of their selves relating to social relationships as well as metaphysical entities such as *Allah*.

Amina (Kalpitiya)

Amina, a mother of three sons and in her early 30s, migrated to Kuwait after the death of her first husband, who died in the crossfire of the ethno-political conflict in Jaffna. The pain of her husband's death and her consequent feelings of losing respect as a widow transform in Saudi Arabia as she begins to court an Indian Tamil Muslim man who works as a driver. She eventually marries, and her new marriage helps her to re-negotiate her social status after her return from Saudi Arabia to Kalpitiya. She and her husband re-imagine their lives together, and they create plans for re-migrating together, as they aim to save money towards the future creation of a sustainable livelihood. Amina was born in Jaffna in the Northern Province, and her family left Jaffna in 1992 to Mannar.

My husband was killed in the fighting. Your book is not enough to capture my pain Sajida . . . I loved Azfar so much. He did everything for us. I did not have to worry about money. He always asked me what special foods I wanted to eat, and no matter how hard it was, he'd find a way to buy them for me. [She starts crying.] I felt loved and respected by him. Men don't respect women, but Azfar respected me. He always used to say, 'If I can't give food and clothing to my family, what kind of man am I?' My job was to look after and raise our sons. His tollil(work) was difficult, but he didn't want me to work. When he died, I felt the pain of losing his love, and losing a friend . . . My husband was no longer there to protect me, so I also lost respect in society . . . Our people always like to talk and

blame. Without a husband, they started saying all kinds of things . . . that I can't look after my sons properly, I must be looking at other men, those kinds of things. . . . I felt like a dead person. There was fighting happening all around us, but I couldn't really think about it. How was I going to feed my sons? . . . I couldn't stand the pain of being in the world without him. So I decided to go to Kuwait.

Amina works in Kuwait for a year, but then returns to Sri Lanka after the death of her mother. She migrates a second time as she finds no other means to support herself and her sons, and she continues to feel alone and marginalised in Kalpitiya. She describes how she meets her second husband in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Saadiq was the driver in the house where I was working . . . I couldn't talk to him, I couldn't even look at him. We would both get in trouble. But I kept looking at him from the side of my eyes. And he was looking at me too. I would feel myself blush sometimes, and I was worried madam would notice . . . I liked the way he went about his work. He was quiet and dutiful, but always had a sense of dignity about him. I felt shy when I caught Saadiq looking at me from the corner of his eye because I knew he liked me. [I asked her, How did you know?] I just knew. [She smiles, giggles, and bows her head.]

. . . Saadiq saw me and treated me as a human being. Before I met him, I'm not sure what I felt about myself [while she was in Saudi Arabia]. I was a machine, I had to work. I had to forget about Azfar so that I could send money home . . . I started talking to Saadiq almost every evening [on a mobile phone hidden from her employer], but I was scared . . . I felt it was inappropriate to talk to him too much. But when we would talk, I remembered I was human, that Allah did actually exist. And I kept thinking about my sons—they needed a father again. I told him that I was only interested in marriage. Saadiq was a good man. He wasn't looking at my body . . . He called my brother in Sri Lanka and told him he wanted to marry me . . . We finished our contracts and went back to our countries.

. . . At the beginning [of her second marriage], I don't know if I was happy. I was glad to be married. [Do you love him?] Now I do, but it took time. He's very different from Azfar who would do any kind of work so that we could live well. Saadiq can't do hard labour. He can drive and do electrician work. It's hard for him to find that kind of work in Kalpitiya, it's not his ur (community/homeland). If I didn't work, we would not be able to eat.

Amina does not talk readily about her love for Saadiq, but of her respect for him. She feels disappointed about the difficulty he faces in finding work. But during one visit, I observe their interactions as Saadiq departs to work in a quarry for a couple weeks. She was quiet in between bursts of advice to him. Her body was still and tense, and her eyes lined with tears. He was not his normal talkative self. As he walks out the door he tells me to visit her more while he is gone. They don't touch each other, but his gaze rests on her and he smiles. After his departure, Amina and I sit together quietly.

He can't tolerate that kind of work . . . it will be too hard for him. I was close to him when he worked before, but now he will be far away. Inshallah (god-willing) Sajida, it's going to be hard without him. I will miss him . . . It's good Saadiq has been here with me. Life is still very difficult, but I don't worry as much about what people think. I have no peace. My naseeb (fate) is to work. But he is here. After we both work abroad for a few more years, we will have money to set up our own tollil (work), we can finish building our house. My sons will finish their studies properly. I hope my mane(heart/being) will be at peace. Allah knows how our lives will be.

Shafna (Kalpitiya)

Shafna, a woman in her late twenties, says that it was her husband's infidelity, violence and alcoholism that drove her to migrate to Saudi Arabia. She had hoped that her transnational migration would improve her economic position, help her to re-negotiate her relationship with her husband, and help provide her with a new sense of respect among his kin. But things do not turn out well for her while abroad and her migration does not drastically change the state of her marriage. She explains how the traumatic experiences she confronted while abroad changed her and made her more determined to create a better life for herself and her children.

My parents had both gone to Saudi Arabia so that we would grow up well . . . They gave me away [in marriage] with lots of gold. Within a year, it was almost all gone, Azeem had sold it.

. . . The first time he beat me was when I told him I was pregnant. It was a month after our wedding. He didn't believe that I was carrying his child. He called me a prostitute and said I was sleeping with other men. I had his child in my stomach, but he kept beating me. I realized then that Azeem did not love me. I feel much paasam (love/care) for him. Maybe I'm crazy. But I know he's a good person. They [his immediate kin] all treat him badly, his father smokes ganja (marijuana) and drinks. He was beaten a lot as a child.

. . . Azeem thinks that someone did seyvinna (witchcraft) on him, and that he will never be happy married. He had wanted to marry another girl he loved, but his parents had wanted him to marry me for my money.

. . . The first time I found out that he had slept with another woman, I shouted at him and could only cry. I asked him how he could he betray me. He would come home drunk, then beat me. If you look at Hashim [her second child], he is like a stick. I was beaten while he was in my womb, and I ate little . . . He told me to leave him, he didn't want me. I didn't have money anymore . . . They [his kin members] say that I am a bad wife who doesn't know how to hold my tongue. And I can't control my husband. My parents are too far away to help [they live in her birthplace in a distant province]. Anyway, I can't say much to them because I went against their advice to not marry Azeem.

. . . I went to Saudi because I could not bare seeing my children with no food. But the hardest thing was the pain I felt knowing that he would not come to me [to have sex] . . . I wanted to save money to build a house for myself and my children. Then maybe Azeem would change when he sees that I have a way to survive. I was unlucky. Allah gave me the chance to migrate, but I came back with nothing.

In Saudi Arabia, Shafna is sold by her kefil (sponsor) to a trafficking racket, and for two years, she is made to work without pay to change houses and employers every two to four weeks.

I was not able to call home. Nobody knew what had happened to me. My parents went to the [recruitment] agent in Maradana [Colombo, the capital], and they were told them that I had 'jumped/escaped' [left her sponsor's house]. One day, I managed to call Azeem. I thought he would be happy to hear from me, but he said, 'You jumped so that you could work outside and sleep with Arab men. Don't come back, I don't want you anymore!' He cut the line. Can you believe him? [She starts crying.] With all my suffering, he couldn't even say one comforting word to me.

She also talks about the physical pain in her body that developed while she was abroad and worsened upon her return.

I started having pain in the middle of my wrists. First I noticed it after lifting heavy carpets up to the top floor of the house. Once I fainted. I was carrying a gas cylinder up to the top floor. I felt a sharp pain ripping through my chest, I could not stand it. Sometimes you can't even place a finger on my body . . . It started to come in the night when I could not sleep, and I would start thinking about Azeem, about him sleeping with other women. How could I still love him when he was so bad? . . . The pain is always there now. But it gets worse when he beats me, and when I think about my life too much. I am pained thinking that he doesn't love me, that he thinks I slept with other men. I ask Allah, why is I am being treated this way. I cry a lot. I ask Allah for forgiveness, and to make him [Azeem] see differently . . . It's the pain in my heart that's hard. [She starts to cry.]

. . . I'm still here because I don't think about these things for too long. I would not be able to care for my children. It's for them that I live. Look at her [pointing to her daughter], how can you not smile? [She relaxes and smiles.] They are a gift from Allah.

. . . The bad things about going abroad is all this pain and that I came back with nothing. The good thing [she pauses for a while] is that Allah gave me a way to come back. I prayed, I always found my strength. When I was in the shelter in Saudi, I had just finished praying my fortieth raqat (a series of non-compulsory prayers) one day, and the social worker came to tell me that I could leave the next day! My du'a (prayer) was answered just as the words left my heart. I have been given a second chance in life.

. . . Even if things with Azeem have not changed, I came back with courage . . . I now have a plan to set up my own shop somehow so I have some money and my children will study well. I don't want people to talk about me, I know that I am on the 'straight path' [the way of faith].

Shafna is now in the process of getting the local religious leadership to intervene to help stop the violence at home. She is also in the process of applying for a loan to set up a small shop.

Jansila (Kalpitiya and Kuwait)

Jansila is an unmarried woman in her late twenties who has been migrating for the past decade between Kalpitiya, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and she is currently working in Kuwait. She says she first migrated to save money for her dowry and to ease financial strains in her household. As she continued to migrate, her family grew dependent on her remittances, and though migrating for the fifth time, she still does not have savings. She says she 'doesn't feel right' anymore when she returns to Kalpitiya, she is sad that she could not marry a boy with whom she had fallen in love, and she dislikes the ways in which 'people talk' about her being unmarried. She endures hard working conditions in Kuwait, but feels that she can finally save money now for her dowry. She talks constantly about 'a different kind of life' with a prospective spouse.

Jansila's traumatic experience of rape as an eighteen year-old by a goat herder in Saudi Arabia left pervasive effects on her self-esteem and her aspirations for intimacy with a man. She has a negative conception of the physicality of her body, she both desires and fears 'being with a man' (i.e., having sex), and she is ambivalent about getting married. Though she says that she does not feel she has been 'spoiled' by her experience of rape, she expresses her concern that perhaps no potential spouse would find her attractive, as she thinks she is dark and fat. Soon after her arrival in Kuwait, she becomes attracted to a man, Farook, who works as a driver in her neighbourhood whom she tries to court. Farook

helps her to buy a mobile phone and to send things home, and he is the only person in Kuwait whom she can talk to. She giggles and evades my questions when I ask her directly about sex, but I observe from her flirtatious interaction with Farook that she seeks physical attention from him.

Farook works for me as my driver and research assistant in Kuwait, and he becomes a trusted informant. After some time, he confides in me about his relationship with Jansila, describing the sexual innuendos that are a part of his conversations with her. He says he had declined both her invitation for sex, and her proposal for marriage. He feels that she is not a virgin, as she 'expresses things only an experienced woman would know', suspecting that 'she has been spoiled'. He says that most women domestic workers desire sex when they have been in Kuwait for a while as, 'the loneliness and stress drives them crazy. After all, they are human too, how can one blame them for not wanting it?' So while appearing empathetic to a migrant woman's sexual needs, he himself does not want to marry one, preferring instead to find a wife back in his village who is 'poor and innocent'.

Hence, I get two different stories about Jansila's intentions. Rather than deciding on which version is 'correct', I see both stories as indicative of her psycho-social reality as she contends with various moral judgements as a young, single migrant woman, desiring both intimacy and an eventual marriage.

Discussion

Agency Within Spousal Relations: Desire, Love and Honour

The ethnographies presented above highlight the different ways in which migrant women's emotion and agency transform in the course of their migration and in relation to past, present or prospective spousal relations. Through their transnational migration, women defy gendered norms of mobility that are prevalent in rural Sri Lanka, but at the same time, they remain largely within its cultural order. They continue to place importance upon traditional, Islamic virtues of perseverance, humility, honour and the need to be respected by spouses, kin and community. The feelings they discuss of being judged in their communities of origin in Sri Lanka conflate with those of dehumanization as they work and live as domestic workers in the Gulf. While they may not articulate an awareness of their agency, I suggest that the ways in which migrant women re-define their aspirations for honour, their understanding of relations with spouses and kin, and their views of their lives, are constitutive of agentive action. Their stories demonstrate the variations that can exist in migrant women's experiences. Amina's story demonstrates a sense of enhanced respect that followed her last migration, as she met her future spouse in Saudi Arabia, and her social status consequently transformed from that of a widow to a married woman. However, Shafna's sense of (dis)honour has remained more or less the same after her return with the continued infidelity and violence of her husband and the ongoing judgements she receives from his kin members. In contrast, Jansila's self-image appears to worsen with her continued unmarried status, which is partly related to the non-resolution of her traumatic experience of rape and the deep implications it has had upon her physical body and her sense of self.

I found that women's verbal expression of being loved and loving their spouses is integrally tied to being provided for financially by them, as a man who provides for the family conveys respect for women's primary role of mothering. Women generally feel it is a man's duty to be the breadwinner, even though in reality, this is not always the case. For example, the way in which Amina expressed her 'love' towards her husband is closely connected to her need to be respected and provided for financially. Her strong sense of entitlement as a wife and mother contributes to her disappointment in her second husband's limited ability to provide for her.

Turning to the perspectives of men, I found that men often expressed being emasculated by the conditions of poverty, which prevent them from fulfilling their financial obligations towards the family, and leads to women being compelled to migrate out of economic necessity. Consequently, spousal separation had the potential to create both enhanced distance or intimacy within spousal relations. Men's sense of being socially and economically incapable could get worse with the migration of their wives, as they are left behind to tend to the feminine role of child and household care. Those who had not had the embodied experience of migration found it difficult to understand what their wives experienced. This sense of male emasculation is also thought to influence the occurrence of extra-marital affairs. At least a quarter of the women I had interviewed across Sri Lanka talked about incidents of their husbands (or the husbands of their close women relatives or friends) having been involved in extra-marital affairs, and a smaller number reported husbands filing for separation or divorce during or following their migration abroad. While the men whom I interviewed did not speak of their direct involvement in affairs, they did discuss the incidence of affairs among their male neighbours or friends.

That said, I also interviewed numerous husbands and brothers of migrant women who discussed feelings of depression and uselessness with me. (See also Gamburd, 2000 on this point.) I observed cases where men appeared to manoeuvre their new roles with love, care and responsibility, demonstrating genuine feelings of loss towards their wives' absence while often taking on their new responsibilities in child-care with humour and respect.

While abroad, women respond to these experiences primarily by seeking, in a sense, to re-humanize themselves by hoping to receive emotional support from spouses and children back home through phone conversations or the exchange of letters, or from prospective spouses and love interests whom they would meet near or within the confines of their employers' homes. In circumstances where women's spouses or courtship interests had/have the experience of being a migrant, their shared embodied experience of migration helped to create more understanding, as men and women grew more intimate with each other as they could inhabit similar physical and emotional worlds. For example, another close returnee migrant informant, Farida, with whom I had lived for half a year, had been able to forge a close relationship with a returnee migrant man to whom she is now married—a relationship she feels she was able to develop largely because of their respective experiences of migration. After the birth of their first child, her new husband re-migrated to Saudi Arabia, and they were able to maintain a loving and healthy marriage despite being separated by migration. They are now presently working together in the same household in the U.A.E. Farida's case can be considered a 'success story', as she has a house—built with her own earnings—a child, and a financially responsible husband who loves her and with whom she is envisioning a more sustainable future of establishing a small business. Similar experiences were also shared among several other close informants and their husbands.

In other cases, migration provides the chance and physical space for women to meet and court potential spouses. Amina may not have had the opportunity to re-marry had she remained in Sri Lanka, but after meeting Saadiq in Saudi Arabia and sharing the experience of working for the same employer, she decides she wants to marry again. Saadiq has told me that he had fallen in love with Amina as he admired how hard she worked and he understood her pain and difficulty. With the case of Jansila, it remains to be seen whether she too will find her spouse while in Kuwait and/or resolve her feelings of ambivalence towards marriage. But regardless of the outcome, she continues to aspire to meet someone while abroad, as she says she has given up hope of meeting someone in Kalpitiya.

The need for women to be respected by their spouses was instrumental to their sense of integrity, self-worth and of being human. The experience of dehumanization within experiences of migration affected the rapid development of this need, which women often projected on those they most loved, or wanted to love. When spouses failed to

provide emotional support while they were abroad, women felt they were being denied the chance to receive love and care—the very things, in the words of one interviewee, that ‘makes me human and not a dog’. On the other hand, women who received spousal empathy and understanding felt greater intimacy and desire towards them, and this strengthened the marriage bond.

Relations With Kin

Kin relations simultaneously served to encourage and discourage migration with various causes and consequences, and they played a fundamental role in the moral judgements delivered upon migrating women and their spouses. As the ways in which women cared for their husbands and children changed in the course of their migration, so did opinions among kin about whether they were ‘good’ or ‘bad’ wives and mothers, while their husbands were often viewed as weak and irresponsible. On the whole, I found that women who had more emotional and social support from families—prior to and during their migration—tended to have more positive outcomes in their sense of self-respect, honour and her prospects for marriage. For example, in the case of Farida, her close relationship with her elder brother and his emotional and financial support for her first migration motivated her to migrate and made her feel constantly respected, supported and cared for despite prevalent stigmatising views in the village. Her sense of self-respect, she says, gave her the confidence she needed to go out and seek a well-established spouse. On the contrary, Shafna’s dire circumstances before she migrated did not improve after her return, in part, as her husband’s kin members privileged his moral integrity over hers, despite his alcoholism and infidelity. Though the only money she earned in her first three months abroad was used to buy the land upon which her house is now built, Shafna was blamed for coming back ‘empty handed’. Part of her pain, she attributes to the judgements delivered by her husband’s kinswomen who insinuate that Shafna had undertaken the moral risks of migration yet failed to increase the family’s socio-economic standing.

Sexuality and the Embodiment of Pain

Female migration is often discussed at various levels of society in relation to the effects migration is thought to have on spousal relations, Sri Lankan families and cultural values, but I suggest that what lies at the core of these discussions is the moral integrity and respectability of the woman migrant, which is ultimately assigned by the ways in which she expresses her sexuality. The ethnographies discussed demonstrate how sexuality, as a fundamental domain of power, shapes kin and communal ideas of women’s honour, and how it arises as a fundamental concern at the different stages of migration. The sexual stigmatisation of migrating women for their perceived sexual promiscuity and vulnerability in the private confines of employers’ houses, and women’s culpability for strained, broken or non-existing spousal relations, structure the moral images that are created of her. Most of the returning migrant women with whom I met were identified and judged by their neighbours for the changes in their body, dress, behaviour and relations with spouses, children and/or other kin. For example, while Farida is considered a ‘success story’ by her neighbours for having a house, husband, child and stable economic position, she is also seen to defy gendered norms of femininity as she is perceived to have a strong, loud and assertive personality, and her style of dress and body language are seen to be disrespectful of local norms.

While migrant women’s physical appearance and body language were a constant focus of attention of kin and community members, within my own observations, I sought to go beyond such communal meta-narratives to penetrate the physical and emotional dimensions of women’s experiences in sexuality at a different level. In my attempts to talk about sexuality directly, I was most often confronted by embarrassment or denial of its importance. However, women indirectly provided descriptions of their desires and emotions relating to sex as part of broader narratives of spousal relations and daily life. For example, the stories of Shafna and Jansila highlight the physiological effects of violence and their unmet desires and emotions towards their spouses/love interests. Shafna’s

embodiment of trauma is reflected in her anxiety attacks and physical pain in her chest. The meaning she assigns to this pain appears to be a complex conflation of various factors involving betrayal, unfulfilled love and sexual desire, repeated physical, emotional and moral violence inflicted by her husband, and her in-laws judgements of her moral dishonour and lack of feminine virtues. In the case of Jansila, her ambivalent feelings towards her physical appearance, marriage, sex and men often arose as part of her discussions of her physical health, her anxiety and her experience of epilepsy and breathlessness. I suggest that her traumatic experience of sexual violence as an eighteen-year old migrant, while not described in detail above, has had lasting effects upon her self-image, her internal sense of honour, and her sexuality.

Agency at the Subject-level: Projects of Self Re-making

Despite the different effects of migration upon women's sense of self-respect and spousal and communal notions of her honour, women were nonetheless able to act as moral agents engaged in processes of making a more embodied self as they hoped for change in their lives. As migrants move transnationally, they begin to reframe their understandings of themselves and their emotions, and these understandings are renegotiated and reconnected along with changes in their sense of place within community, society and nations. The ethnographies above demonstrate how transformations of self can be understood in relation to emotional, existential and/or spiritual changes in women's views of their lives and futures. For many, the pain they experience in being denied empathy and care from their spouses in Sri Lanka, while they worked in the Gulf, relates not only to a loss of love, but to a form of existential questioning as to whether or not they are human and whether their lives are worth living or not. As a way of finding meaning for this pain, some talk of spiritual transformation, while others focus their imaginations on what their future holds. In doing so, women's own political interests in desiring more independence often conflict with their internalized sense of cultural order. They struggle to make sense of their roles in the face of new economic, cultural and social realities associated with migration and recreate their realities, at times appearing to defy structures of power and inequality without necessarily challenging them. They aspire to be seen as respectful and honourable women among kin and community, and they seek to maintain virtuous, moral and socially respected marriages, while also hoping for some degree of economic autonomy. For some women, such as Shafna, the virtues of piety, patience, submission, gratitude, humility and perseverance are important in helping her to alleviate pain, make sense of her experiences and to re-construct notions she holds of her self through a perceived connection to a transcendental being (*Allah*). For others, they appear to outwardly adopt the language of piety and virtue to counter negative representations and preserve self-respectability.

One can say that women's actions, imaginations and capacities to transform their selves can be viewed as part of projects of self re-making, which need to be understood within the particular transnational contexts of rural Muslim Kalpitiya and the Persian Gulf. For Amina, the emotions arising from her relationship with her new spouse, in some senses, not only served to re-humanise her after the sudden and tragic death of her first husband, but they restored her sense of honour and self-respect and led to her new sense of acceptance of her need to continue working. She grew to understand that paid work was a means towards a more sustainable, future livelihood. As for Shafna, despite the hardships she has had to endure, the emotional resilience she developed through migration has given her the determination and courage to create a better life for herself and her children, and to make the bold decision that she is no longer willing to submit to the violence inflicted upon her by her husband. As such, I suggest that it is this very linking of experiences in detailed narrative form, across the various phases of migration, and in relation to different dimensions of experience and knowledge, that illustrates women's most intimately-felt emotions and the complexities involved in their sense of agency.

Conclusions

While economic causes tend to dominate popular perceptions and policy discourse on transnational migration, I argue that women's decision to migrate stem from their emotional involvement with their spouses—past, present or prospective—who are a fundamental focus of women's emotions, affections and desires, and their aspirations for honour. These spousal-influenced decisions can be seen as part of projects for self re-making, within which women act as moral agents in their seeking of enhanced respect and honour. They seek to affect change in relations by desiring the creation of more stability, care and love within relations, or to escape feelings of neglect, betrayal or bereavement, as migration propels relationships to be re-negotiated in the ways in which they are strengthened, negotiated, eroded or sustained. While women's actions may outwardly appear to contradict popular perceptions of their migration decreasing women's respectability, my observations convey that inwardly, it is women's re-imaginings of themselves, their lives and their spousal relations that motivate them to migrate.

As such, their agency is directed towards the re-making of a more embodied self, wherein desires towards spouses and actions to defy sexual stigmatization are directed towards transforming the ways in which they are socially judged as 'good' or 'bad' women. As such, consciously or unconsciously, women use their migration process to perform as moral agents.

This knowledge enables the migrant domestic worker subject to be seen as a complex, feeling being and a moral agent, rather than as a 'victim' of poverty and prejudices, or a threat to culture and religion. I suggest that a closer examination of migrant women's experiences in agency, emotion and sexuality through extensive ethnographic immersion and analysis can help to debunk stereotypes, myths and meta-narratives of the perceived immorality of women migrating. The ethnographies I present here help to explain migrant women's feelings and perceptions of her self, her life and her migration—experiences that are often overlooked and misunderstood by kin, co-community members and policy makers alike. They also illustrate the ways in which women manoeuvre the structural, social and moral confines of their lives, stressing the challenges faced by migrants and their spouses in enjoying fulfilling married and sexual lives, and suggesting the need for improvements to be instituted within the present migration regime to ensure their healthier migration.

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Endnotes

¹ This ranking, accorded by a survey of the Department of Census and Statistics in 2006/07, excludes the war-affected sub-divisions of the Northern and Eastern provinces, which were under the political administration of the Tamil separatist regime at the time. According to the same survey, 40.3 per cent of the population of Kalpitiya has a monthly expenditure per capita below the official poverty line in Sri Lanka.

² 'West Asia' refers to the two sub-regions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (or GCC, which is comprised of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, U.A.E. and Oman) and the Levant (comprised of Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories).

³ Overall migrant remittance earnings were largest source of foreign direct investment, standing at almost US\$3.4 billion or 390,000 million Sri Lankan rupees (SLBFE, 2009).

⁴ The SLBFE has been seeking to reduce domestic work migration by encouraging women to re-train and migrate as 'care-givers' or nurses, and by actively promoting men to migrate for 'semi-skilled' work. Simultaneously, it seeks to improve the regulation of domestic work migration through provisions for mandatory pre-departure training, social insurance schemes, and attempts to forge bilateral agreements with host countries. See Dias & Jayasundere (2001) and HRW (2007).

⁵ With a population of 64,908, the Tamil-speaking population of Kalpitiya is represented three times greater than the national average. 42 per cent of people in Kalpitiya are Sinhalese, 39 per cent are Muslim, and 19 per cent are Tamil, compared to the national average of 82 per cent Sinhalese, 8 per cent Muslim, and 9.4 per cent Tamils (National Census, 2001). While the Sinhalese and Tamils are identified through the language they speak rather than religion, Muslims have chosen to be identified through religion. Tamils and Muslims are distinct groups with their own political and cultural histories, but they have a shared linguistic bond (Nuhman, 2002) and shared experiences of marginalization and discrimination (Haniffa, 2008; ICG, 2007, 2010).

⁶ The study of sexuality and its link to gender has not been without contention. Butler explains that, 'sexual and gender relations, although in no sense causally linked, are structurally linked in important ways' (Butler, 2004: 259). Foucault (1978) describes sexuality as a domain of power, but one where gender norms are always at stake.

⁷ Cantu's (1999) definition of sexuality being an axis of power relations stems from Hondagnue-Sotelo's (1994) definition of gender being more than a variable of migration, but a dimension of power that shapes and organizes migration.

⁸ Much of this work focuses either on groups whose sexuality is 'visible' as it is perceived as problematic (e.g., homosexuals and commercial sex workers). The heterosexual cultures of 'more ordinary' migrant groups in advanced industrialised countries has also been studied (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2005; Ahmadi, 2010), but Hirsch (2003) suggests the need to place focus more on migrants' sexuality in third world societies.

⁹ Social awareness and acceptance of the sexual freedom enjoyed by male migrants is widespread in Sri Lanka, as studies by Gamburd (2000), Smith (2010) and Pathirage and Collyer (2011) show. Studies of Mexicans migrating to the US by Hondagnue-Sotelo (1994) and others also indicate existing double standards in male-female sexual practices, though Gonzalez-Lopez (2005) and Hirsch (2003) have found how these are rapidly changing..

¹⁰ The fact that sexual expression is less restricted among men has been extensively documented across cultures. In the context of the white middle-class in the U.S., Dinnerstein (2002: 5) discusses the bases for asymmetric human sexual privilege, which drives men to insist on unilateral sexual prerogative and inclines women to consent to their insistence.

¹¹ As Caitrin Lynch's (1999) work on 'good girl' Sri Lankan factory workers has shown, once migrant women become mobile subjects, they challenge the patriarchal society, an order which partly rests on ideas of women's sexuality and the policing of women's bodies.

¹² The sexual and moral codes imposed on women, codified and disseminated through patriarchal institutions such as the state, law, religious tenets and their interpreters, and the family, share many similarities despite their being categorized as Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and so on.

¹³ Mernissi's feminist interpretation of Imam Ghazali's *The Revivification of Religious Sciences*—the key Islamic text that codified sexual practices in the eleventh century—stresses the fear within Muslim societies of women's active female sexuality and the difficulty of satisfying female sexual desire (2002: 303), that justifies women being constrained. Without constraints, men would be faced with irresistible sexual attraction that inevitably leads to *fitna* or chaos (Mernissi, 2003).

¹⁴ The *kafala* or sponsorship program in the Arab States, stipulates that an employer is required to sponsor a migrant worker's visa and assume full economic and legal responsibility for him/her during the contracted period. In the case of

a domestic worker, the programme makes it mandatory for her to remain in their employer/sponsor's homes, and prevents her from changing sponsorship. The system is thought to breed exploitation of migrant workers (HRW, 2007).

¹⁵ Mahmood draws attention to the fact that notions of self-realisation also existed in pre-modern history and were not an invention of the liberal tradition. For example, Plato discussed self-mastery over one's passions, and notions exist in Buddhism and mystical traditions of Islam and Christianity of realizing oneself through self-transformation (2001: 207).

¹⁶ For other work from which this discussion stems, see Taylor (1985) for writing on positive and negative freedom, and Carter (1995) for passive and active notions of agency as they relate to demography.

¹⁷ Anthropological conceptions of 'self' are linked to those of 'personhood', which is a social construct, a composite of social relations, and a process involving social, cultural, political and other factors/conditions. You are not a 'person' when you are born but you become a person through your interaction with others over time (Jackson, 1990; Schepher-Hughes and Lock, 1987).

¹⁸ Anthropologists studying emotion and human suffering suggest that emotion can best be understood through the body, as it is physiologically and crucially linked to one's state of feeling and sense of well-being (Unnithan-Kumar, 2001; Lutz and Abu Lughod, 1990; Lawrence, 2000). Good (1994) describes the body as an agent in the construction of meaning, and Schepher-Hughes & Lock (1987) assert the body as a symbol of what is happening in societies and politics, and the control held over it by underlying institutional agendas.

¹⁹ Anderson writes, 'By "dehumanising" the maid and choosing to view her as a human being who is not yet a real human being—with likes and hates, relations of her own, a history and ambitions of her own—but a human being who is socially dead, employers exercise an extreme form of power that is uncommon in other employer-employee relationships' (2000: 121).

²⁰ Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) assert that negative connotations of domestic work exist due to domestic work's relegation to the 'private' and 'non-productive' spheres, as it is carried out in the space of the family, and it is a problematic 'public' 'product' to be sold on markets.

²¹ These ethnographies are based on data that I collected during four to six interviews or ethnographic encounters and over a period of one to two years in Kalpitiya, North-western Sri Lanka.